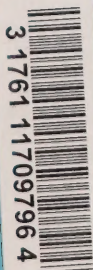


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Towards a distinction between
"service" group and "advocacy
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TOWARDS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN
"SERVICE" GROUP AND "ADVOCACY" GROUP

by

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Towards a distinction between
"service" group and "advocacy" group

It seems impossible to discuss voluntary action in general without differentiating between "service" groups and "advocacy" groups. For the purposes of the Council's analysis and for that of recommendations to be made to the government these appear to us to be the most useful categories. While, as pointed out by Alan Thomas, member of the Council, often one type changes into another, in their pure form however, they are definitely set apart in their characteristics: their *raison d'être*, their goals, their degree of political awareness and involvement, the obstacles they face, their organizational structure, the social background of people engaged in their projects, differ to such an extent that any discussion of the role and importance of voluntary action must take them both into account.

Malcolm Walker in an article entitled "Organizational Change, Citizen Participation and Voluntary Action" in the Journal of Voluntary Action Research asserts that citizen participation ("advocacy" groups) and voluntary action ("service" groups) are very different modes of organized effort. He uses the criterion of change to differentiate between them. Citizen participation is linked with "organizational" change, while voluntarism ("service" group) is linked with "managed" change.

"Organizational change, as the term is used here, refers to a combination of (1) power redistribution; (2) new decision-making structures; and (3) the re-allocation of those resources which provide the

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1. Walker, Malcolm; "Organizational Change, Citizen Participation and Voluntary Action," Journal of Voluntary Action Research, Vol. 4, no. 1-2, Winter-Spring, January-April, 1975.

bases of power, or the introduction of new types of such resources."

"Managed change involves neither power redistribution, nor new types of decision making structures. Resources are reallocated only on a small scale, and only limited new types of resources are introduced into the organization. This is change conducted under the control of power holders."

Their structural composition is perceived by Walker as being essentially different. In citizen groups the key decisions are made horizontally and not by a hierarchy which exists mostly for administrative purposes. Within the organization, there is a rejection of bureaucracy and professionalism, power equalization is the essence. Standardization of activities is low and specialization of roles is minimized. These characteristics are seen as being absent in the "voluntary" action group ('service' group) which, particularly if well established, is moving towards increasing professionalization, specialization, standardization, bureaucratization and hierarchical decision making.

To this we add that the established service organization has usually a broad geographical base with a large membership - high income and salaried staff whereas the citizen group is usually local with a low budget and most likely no permanent professional except for a temporary "animateur".

Traditional voluntarism ("service" group) is based on an acceptance of the principle of representative democracy and the pluralist interpretation of society - that different pressure groups are competing with each other for societal rewards and that power is thus equalized and distributed throughout society.

Its goals and means will be oriented towards what can be accomplished within the existing institutional framework and with the help of the powerful. It is not oriented to basic social change. It is apolitical.

The citizen committee is a political group, a protest group, a criticism of society as it is, a power seeking group, a group that demands to be admitted to the decision making process. It is seen by Walker as being a rejection of representative democracy and a plea for a participatory democracy.

If we admit these differences we must conclude that the implications for society (and for government policy) are far reaching. To support a service group demands no basic philosophical and political re-adjustment on the part of the government bodies, its activities being socially and politically acceptable. To accept citizen groups as legitimate in the long run on the other hand, necessitates an acceptance that power should be shared and made more accessible, agreement that social criticism is a necessary and valid contribution to the health of our nation, that promoting interest and participation among the people is a greater good than promoting dependence and docility, political alienation and subservience, through paternalistic approaches to problem solving.

There seems little doubt among the researchers on the subject that the citizen group affords possibilities for participation in the political process and therefore alleviation of political and social alienation now present in most service groups. For, as reported by Frizzell ("Voluntary Participation: The Canadian Perspective") it is

not membership in a voluntary organization alone that reduces feelings of political powerlessness. There must be participation in the political process. This is not directly available to the volunteer of a service group and only sometimes indirectly. The contact with public bodies in the service group **is almost** always limited to requests for financing. In the advocacy group it is a direct and constantly repeated demand for a reallocation of power (in its favor).

There appears to be another area of significance which differentiates the service group from the advocacy group (referred also as citizen group), that of class involvement. There is consensus among writers that the traditional service group volunteers are middle class and that lower class representatives are extremely unlikely to engage in providing services for others. Only when our basic desires are satisfied can we engage in the altruistic behavior of donating money or time for the benefit of others. There is some evidence that the poor, the less integrated and most alienated group in society, will only join a group when there is hope of relief in the short term of adverse conditions directly affecting them. However the situation here is not clear cut and Frizzell differentiates between three types of citizen group based on class membership.

" From an overview of the literature dealing with new community and citizen groups, there would appear to be three forms they might take.

1. New groups could be purely expressive; communes or recreational groups for the elderly are examples.
2. New groups could be instrumental but with a low socioeconomic issue bias and a tendency to be concerned with

one specific problem, such as housing or poverty.

3. New groups could exhibit the same general characteristics as traditional associations (i.e., middle class dominance) but be related to new or ephemeral fads, such as pollution and specific issues in town or city planning.

While most new groups would appear to be compounds of these three types, by far the most important for our study is the second category, since this constitutes the most significant departure from those traits associated with traditional voluntary associations." (which have failed to enlist lower class participation)

These groups face very particular problems, different from those of the traditional service groups. In Frizzell's words:

"The most important of these is the dilemma of tactical presentation of interests and opinions. If they develop a middle-class or moderate stance, then they may achieve nothing. And if they achieve success through militant campaigns, then they will incur the anger of those whom they depend on for redress of grievances, perhaps even for financial aid."

Frizzell goes on to quote the views of the Hon. John Munro on this subject, (reported in "Citizen Participation, 1971")

"More recently, we have begun to move in the direction of seeing the development of communities as a two phase process. The first phase is the process of community animation motivating the poor to organize and work towards the identification of their own needs, the establishment of their own sense of community and capacity for collective strength in place of individual alienation and resignation. Some of these experiments, although modest, have produced rather startling results. Clearly there is within the culture of the poor and the alienated minorities a tremendous latent potential and capacity for self-improvement and self-betterment....

It is phase two of this process that confronts us with the far greater challenge. If we meet the articulation by this community of its grievances and aspirations with a stone wall of either opposition or apathy, we will either destroy it or transform it into an army determined to destroy us. If community development is to be a reality and not a mere sham,

then we must be prepared to mobilize the necessary resources - including a willingness to share some of our own power - to meet the legitimate demands of the new community."

Frizzell adds:

"The effect of new groups over the long term is not likely to be great unless there is a reversal of policies and attitudes among officials."

This reinforces our view that if citizen groups are to become an effective tool in the society and among individuals as a vehicle for more power sharing and participation in general as well as a countervailing force acting for disadvantaged interests in our society, much rethinking will have to be done about the nature of the social contract. A resistance to the tendency of increasing bureaucratization and professionalization will have to be developed. (As Walker has perceived, the principal structures through which power is exercised are bureaucratic and professional).

For it may be that in the future, the "volunteer" in the services area will be indispensable only to provide the human touch, as governments are assuming more and more of the services formerly provided by the volunteer agencies. In Quebec, for instance, the wide range of services taken over in the last few years from the voluntary associations in the fields of social services and health are now regarded as a "right" of the citizen and therefore as a duty for the government to provide.

The "volunteer" in citizens groups on the other hand may be irreplaceable. No government agency, no semi-public organization can replace him for his stance is not "with" but "against"; a continual protest against established power.

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